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## WHO rejects 'safe' smoking study

A STUDY commissioned by three tobacco companies that claims there is no link between passive smoking and lung cancer has been dismissed by World Health Organisation (WHO) experts.

A group of six scientists asked by Philip Morris Europe, British-American Tobacco and Rothmans International to examine the effects of environmental smoke – or passive smoking – found no obvious dangers.

"There is no reason to believe lung cancer is caused by breathing environmental tobacco smoke," said Jeffrey Idle, chairman of the group and professor of medicine and molecular

biology at Trondheim University in Norway.

But Alan Lopez and Richard Peto, who recently published estimates of tobacco deaths in Europe for the WHO, said: "The idea that passive smoking does not kill anyone is absurd when you consider that cigarette smoking is by far the biggest cause of lung cancer." Lopez, an epidemiologist in tobacco at the WHO in Geneva, added: "The weight of evidence suggests that passive smoking significantly increases the risk of getting lung cancer."

The six scientists, including academics from Spain, Norway, Belgium and the

Sandra Smith

Netherlands, analysed 48 epidemiological studies on environmental tobacco smoke and measured exposure rates. They assessed the relative risk of lung cancer for non-smokers at 1.01 – a figure of one would mean no increased risk, while a figure of two would be a doubled risk.

But critics said the study was merely an attempt by cigarette manufacturers to allay the fears of the non-smoking public.

France's first passive smoking court case, due to begin on 29 May, will

examine claims that a 44-year-old former bank employee, Lella Ozeir, who died in January 1995 from lung cancer, was a victim of passive smoking.

Ozeir, a non-smoker, had worked at the Banque France de l'Orient in Paris for almost 20 years. She had repeatedly requested to work in a non-smoking office, but it is alleged that her employers rejected her appeals even after cancer was diagnosed.

The National Committee against Addiction to Smoking in Paris fears that the new study will be used by the tobacco industry and smokers' rights groups in cases like the Ozeir case. Committee spokesman Pascal Melhan-Cheinin said: "The expert appointed by the bank to tell the court there is no risk is Marcel Roberfroid, one of the scientists who published the new study. There is no doubt he will use this."

Anne Marie Müller from the Norwegian government's National Council on Tobacco and Health said: "Norwegian scientists reject the study's findings. About 50 people die every year in Norway as a result of passive smoking."

"The main impact of this study will be on the general public. It will be a crutch for smokers."